

Case History: The Boston Safe Shops Project

- **Describe the impacted community (population, neighborhood, general statistics, history, etc).**

Boston's more than 500 automotive shops, located primarily in low-income communities of color, are a source both of well-paying jobs and of potential hazardous exposures to employees and residents. Safe Shops currently focuses on the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Mattapan and Roxbury. The table below summarizes some of the neighborhood demographics and health concerns in the target area.

Neighborhood	Roxbury	Dorchester		Mattapan
		North	South	
Pop. % non-White	85%	82%	67%	97%
Pop. % below poverty level	29.2%	22.9%	17.6%	17.5%
Asthma hospitalizations per 1,000 children under 5 (1999-2003)	14.8	13.7	11.4	9.9
Elevated blood lead levels (10 ug/dL or greater)	2.2%	4.4%	3.8%	2.8%
Number of Auto Shops	36	163		45

The Safe Shops Project works to reduce occupational and environmental health hazards without having to close these businesses.

- **What are/were the problems affecting the community?**

Auto body and repair shops produce hazardous waste, store flammable and hazardous materials, and release organic solvents and VOCs as regular business practice. Because of lack of zoning laws, auto shops are located in residential areas, next to schools and playgrounds. They are commonly transient businesses, making them sometimes hard to locate and regulate. Some of the auto body and repair hazards that impact the community are outlined in the table below:

Mechanical Repair Shop Hazards	Body and Paint Shop Hazards
Workers not using proper personal protective equipment (dust masks for working with solvents/paint, etc.)	Workers not using proper personal protective equipment (dust masks for working with solvents/paint, etc.)
Improper storage of flammable materials	Improper storage of flammable materials
Workers not adequately trained/informed – no knowledge of MSDS, safety plan, etc.	Workers not adequately trained/informed – no knowledge of MSDS, safety plan, etc.
Parts cleaning in uncovered solvent systems	Cleaning of paint guns releasing large amounts of solvent into the air
Improper and “off label” use of spray organic	Spray painting outside of an enclosed spray

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solvents	booth
Improper storage of auto batteries, scrap metal, and spare parts	Heavy metals and vapors exposures from body work and cutting/welding
Improper labeling, storage, and disposal of hazardous wastes	Sanding and body work being done without dust capture devices or respiratory protection

These issues not only directly impact the people working within the shop, but sometimes result in exposures in a community that is already over burdened with health issues and toxic releases from other sources such as diesel busses or other polluting businesses.

• What partnerships were formed to address the problems and challenges?

The Safe Shops Project formed partnerships based upon environmental health, enforcement, and community. The public health entities (Boston Public Health Commission / partnering health centers) have the ability and resources to develop educational materials and help workers and community access health care and other resources. The community groups have the ability to raise awareness within the neighborhoods, conduct outreach with the workers and refer them back to the health centers and even help identify problem shops that need intervention. And finally, the enforcement partners (Inspectional Services Department) have the authority to gain access to shops that might turn other Safe Shops partners away and the experience to identify environmental or other violations. This three pronged approach is outlined in the diagram below:

Coordinated Safe Shops Approach



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- **What were the major challenges the community faced or faces in overcoming the problems?**

During the roll out of the project, two major obstacles occurred. The first was addressing how to create a training program that was useful to the workforce.

The second was that it was extremely difficult to gain the trust of a workforce that is normally only used to dealing with enforcement agencies. Owners and workers would often turn away Safe Shops staff and partners.

- **How did the community overcome the challenges? If the community wasn't able to address the challenges, what were the impacts on the project? How did the project move forward?**

These two obstacles were addressed through focus groups and implementing our first tail gate training. First, we asked our enforcement partners to 'nominate' shop owners that might be interested in attending a focus group. We provided free dinner and gave each attendee a grocery store gift certificate as an incentive for attending.

The discussions centered on 1. What topics should be included in a training; 2. How do people learn best (video / posters / hand outs); and 3. How / Where / When should a training be conducted. We then held a separate worker focus group at a community health center. The worker and owner focus groups were held separately because workers might be less likely to disclose health concerns in front of their employer and because an immigrant workforce might be more hesitant to come to a government building after work hours for a 'discussion'.

We were able to put together a training based upon the input gathered from shop owners and workers, as well as some feed back from the Inspectional Services Department about the common problems encountered in shops. We then chose one of the larger shops that had attended the focus group and asked them if they would host a training. During the training, another shop owner walked in and requested that we come to his shop next. It was not long after that shop owners and workers were recognizing Safe Shops staff and partners as the people who were helping them access resources such as health care, safer alternatives to toxic chemicals, and personal protective equipment.

- **What tools or methods did the community use that are transferable to other communities facing similar issues?**

One of the goals of the Safe Shops Project is to create tools that can be used to replicate this program in other communities. Some of the items we have created include:

- Sample focus group questions
- Shop environmental assessment questions and worker surveys

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- Sample letters, flyers and outreach materials to auto shops
- A standard training curricula designed for auto body and auto repair shops
- A DVD of the Safe Shop training video Auto Shop Pollution Prevention: Protecting Your Environment, Your Employees, and Your Business that includes a Spanish/English menu option.
- A Safe Shops Tool Box (a laminated guide for environmental and occupational health and safety in the auto shop)

• What were the major successes in the eyes of the community?

Major successes in the eyes of the community include training over 440 auto shops workers on best practices in their work place. This resulted in real changes in behavior and shop conditions that improved health, such as an increase in the number of shops storing solvents in a labeled and closed container and an increase in the amount of workers using personal protective equipment.

Another success is the amount of shops that are using aqueous brake cleaner in place of aerosol, reducing exposure to asbestos and solvents. To date, 12 shops have adopted the aqueous brake cleaner through the Safe Shops Project. Other shops have adopted different methods of pollution prevention and implemented personal protective equipment after coming into contact with Safe Shops.

And most recently the Safe Shops Project was chosen as a 'Pilot Community' by the US EPA and CDC. This partnership will help Safe Shops be able to better quantify pollution prevention and measure the project's positive impact on the community.

Community Leader Bio Sketch: Tiffany Skogstrom is the Project Coordinator at the Boston Public Health Commission's Safe Shops Project. Tiffany works with employees at automotive businesses that are overburdened with toxic chemicals, have little or no protection measures, and no health care. She works to deliver education and health care to this workforce, and get a commitment from auto shop managers to establish pollution prevention measures in the work place. Tiffany is a New England Regional Environmental Leadership Program Fellow, and has worked with Massachusetts Jobs with Justice in the call for universal health care and organized toxics campaigns for Health Care Without Harm. Previously, she worked with Clean Water Action, MassPIRG, and advocated for children as a caseworker in an adolescent group home.

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